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Feature Focus - August 2012



I recently came across the following vignette in a novel called *Cutting for Stone* (which I recommend) by physician/author Abraham Verghese. The dialogue is between a young man and an older woman who is part of the community that helped to raise him. It is for me an eloquent description of cultivating and discerning one's call or vocation in life.

I chose the specialty of surgery because of Matron, that steady presence during my boyhood and adolescence. "What is the hardest thing that you can possibly do?" she said when I went to her for advice on the darkest day of the first half of my life.

I squirmed. How easily Matron probed the gap between ambition and expediency. "Why must I do what is hardest?" "Because, Marion, you are an instrument of God. Don't leave the instrument sitting in its case, my son. Play! Leave no part of your instrument unexplored. Why settle for 'Three Blind Mice' when you can play the 'Gloria'?" How unfair of Matron to invoke that soaring chorale which always made me feel that I stood with every mortal creature looking up to the heavens in dumb wonder. She understood my unformed character. "But, Matron, I can't dream of playing Bach, the 'Gloria' ...," I said under my breath. I'd never played a string or wind instrument. I couldn't read music. "No, Marion," she said, her gaze soft, reaching for me, her gnarled hands rough on my cheek. "No. Not Bach's 'Gloria.' Yours! Your 'Gloria' lives within you. The greatest sin is not finding it, ignoring what God made possible in you."... Surgery was the most difficult thing I could imagine. And so I became a surgeon.

In my time of ministry with you in the Southeast Conference I have both spoken about and witnessed how God calls each of us in our lives – to vocation, to relationship, to ministry, to ways of being God's instruments in this world. As part of a "reformed and reforming" tradition, the notion of the "priesthood of all believers" has been made evident and been reinforced. This has been especially true in the Theology Among the People (TAP) program and in our Global Theological Education experiences, where I have had the privilege of being with believers on the journey as they have discerned a deep stirring within them that has led to transformation. It has been a precious blessing to be with individuals and groups as they have become attuned to the unique "Gloria" that lives within each one of them and us.



Indeed, each of us is an instrument of God and each of us is called to leave no part of our instrument

UCC News

UCC Newsroom

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

[Extravagant welcome at Massachusetts UCC now showering visitors on mission trips](#)

Weary travelers on mission trips in the Massachusetts area have always been welcome at Wollaston Congregational Church, UCC, in Quincy. But this summer, a stop at the 100-year-old Parish House has been made a lot more welcoming, with the addition of shower facilities.





Our instrument
unexplored. We
experience
God's call in so
many myriad
ways and at
different times
and
circumstances
in our lives.
That call may be
to singlehood or
partnered life; to
parenthood or
another form of
generativity; to a
particular
vocation or
change in
vocation; to
ministry in the

church and in the world. At this time in my life, I believe that God is calling me to minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ in the national setting of our beloved denomination as the Minister for Members in Discernment on the Ministry Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) team of Local Church Ministries. In my new position, I will be charged with "cultivating a culture of call" within the UCC. That, my friends, is a daunting job description! Thank goodness I do not have to do this alone, for it is a vocation all of us share as followers of Christ and members of his church. We are called together to help each individual and community discover and be equipped to sing its own "Gloria," in different voices and styles that, in God's harmonious way, move beyond cacophony to one great chorus of diverse and beautiful voices.

The idea that we are all called to ministry can easily take on the significance (or lack thereof) of a well-worn cliché, evoking the background noise of elevator music rather than a great sacred chorale or a deeply evocative spiritual. As instruments of God's activity in the world, we are charged to step out of our cases and to practice the music of life that calls us all to be the beloved community. If our ministries, both individual and shared, do not bring glory to God, then we have fallen short of fulfilling what God has made possible in us.

In this time of transition, in our conference and in the life of the church, may we be attuned to God's call to each of us and to all of us. May we find the "Gloria" within and play and sing it out faithfully and fully. Whether gathered or scattered, may we not lose touch with the sacred hum of the universe which emanates from our Creator. May we sing together, each in our own unique voice, "*Gloria in excelsis deo!*" Glory to God in the highest! Amen and amen.

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